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DE RUEHPU #0210/01 0431716
ZNR UUUUU ZZH ZDK ALLSTAS CLR LOGS
O 121716Z FEB 08
FM AMEMBASSY PORT AU PRINCE
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 7659
INFO RUEHZH/HAITI COLLECTIVE
RUEHBR/AMEMBASSY BRASILIA 1794
RUEHMN/AMEMBASSY MONTEVIDEO 0116
RUEHSA/AMEMBASSY PRETORIA 1599
RUEHSG/AMEMBASSY SANTIAGO 2359
RUEHMT/AMCONSUL MONTREAL 0258
RUEHQU/AMCONSUL QUEBEC 1022
RUEATRS/DEPT OF TREASURY WASHDC
RUCOWCV/CCGDSEVEN MIAMI FL
RUMIAAA/HQ USSOUTHCOM J2 MIAMI FL

UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 PORT AU PRINCE 000210

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STATE FOR WHA/CAR, DRL, S/CRS, INR/IAA)
SOUTHCOM ALSO FOR POLAD
STATE PAS AID FOR LAC/CAR
TREASURY FOR MAUREEN WAFER

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [ASEC](#) [ECON](#) [HA](#)

SUBJECT: HAITI PUTS ON CARNIVAL 2008: NO DEATHS, IMPROVED
SECURITY, LOTS OF FUN

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¶1. Summary: Improved security, a better organized HNP, and a greater Diaspora presence marked Haiti's 2008 Carnival celebrations. With the approval of the EAC, Embassy officers were permitted to attend Carnival events for the first time in 5 years. The organizational skill the GOH and private groups bring to bear on Carnival events is rarely equaled in the public or private sector. End summary.

¶2. The 2008 Carnival season in Haiti kicked off late afternoon February 1 with a parade of local artists, and continued with large, raucous celebrations the next four days that lasted far into the early morning hours. The government chose the environment and "green Haiti" as the theme of this year's Carnival. In Port au Prince, President Preval opened the traditional Carnival ball at the National Palace on Saturday February 2, presenting 39 queens and 21 kings of Carnival including a number representing the nation's diaspora communities abroad. The President, a music fan, was televised dancing to live traditional merengue music. Media campaigns were mounted in favor of responsible alcohol consumption and sexual behavior. The Ministry of Women's Affairs broadcast repeated TV spots warning against indecent behavior and the demeaning of women during carnival celebrations. Prime Minister Alexis, speaking to a reporter at the National Palace at the February 2 ball, urged citizens to be careful in the conduct of the "relationships" that take place during Carnival and to use condoms.

¶3. Crowds downtown on Sunday, Monday and Tuesday were estimated at around 250,000 each evening. Parades of masked performers wound through downtown Port au Prince in the late afternoon and early evening. They were followed later by large floats crammed with revelers, some costumed and many wearing t-shirts of sponsoring businesses. The central parade route was lined with stands sponsored by local businesses, which also sponsored the numerous floats. Many floats carried premier Haitian Konpa bands - including T-Vice, Djakout Mizik, RAM, Carimi and Kreyol La -- blaring out their music at ear-splitting volume, bringing forth frenzied cheers and wild dancing from tightly-packed throngs of delighted spectators.

¶4. The Haitian National Police (HNP) was out in force in the downtown area, ready to "surge" and intervene at the first sign of any disturbance. HNP Director General Mario Andresol outlined to RSO the HNP's plan for Carnival, focusing on creating multiple HNP static posts poised to react and intervene at the first sign of disorder. In the event, the plan was well-executed with no major disruptions. HNP reported no deaths directly related to the festivities, and a total of 568 injuries in the Port au Prince Carnival. Overall there was considerably less violence than at the 2007 Carnival, although traditional Carnival conduct, including fights and drunkenness, were frequent. EmbOffs in viewing stands did witness several fights, most of which were resolved quickly either by HNP or under pressure from the surrounding crowds. Injuries resulted from use of knives, bottles and other improvised weapons, but none from firearms.

Nearly two hundred additional injuries were reported in smaller celebrations in provincial capitals. Embassy received reports from representatives of organizations implementing programs in the Port au Prince slum of Cite Soleil that some gang members from that area engaged in shake-downs of well off-looking Carnival-goers within site of central viewing stands. Injuries resulted from use of knives, bottles and other improvised weapons, but none from firearms. Nearly two hundred additional injuries were reported in smaller celebrations in provincial capitals.

¶5. Embassy EAC determined that the security environment had improved sufficiently to allow employees to attend this year's Carnival events within certain limitations. No incidents involving Embassy officers were reported as they observed the scene from stands along the route. Embassy officers, who for security reasons have little street-level contact with Haitians in the capital, were able to converse with revelers. Conversations focused on the music and the

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common issues of interest to the majority of Haitians: the lack of jobs and the possibility of going to the U.S. EmbOffs encountered many English-speaking Haitian emigres to the U.S. who returned for Carnival. (The GOH had intentionally geared Carnival publicity toward Diaspora communities in New York and Miami, hoping to attract that lucrative group back to Haiti for the celebrations. American Airlines reported that their flights to Haiti for the Carnival period were overbooked.)

¶6. Carnival in Haiti is produced a rare public-private organizational and financial partnership. The national government allocated 80 million gourdes (USD 2.2 million) for Carnival, with the lion's share (50 million gourdes - USD 1.4 million) going to celebrations in the capital. However, the private sector pitched in mightily, reportedly to the tune of 113 million gourdes (USD 3.1 million), mostly for sponsored floats featuring well-known musical groups. The municipality of Port au Prince reportedly contributed money for theme-floats ("chars allegoriques"). The mayor of Jacmel, motorcycle dealer Edo Zenny, boasted that he contributed USD 30,000 of his own money for Carnival in his city.

SANDERSON